

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and Congressman Michael A. Arcuri (D-NY) today led 11 other House members in a bipartisan effort calling on President Obama to proceed with the replacement of the Marine One helicopter fleet in order to adequately protect the President of the United States and to avoid wasting the \$3 billion in taxpayer money that has already been spent on the project. Lockheed Martin in Owego, New York is leading the project to replace the current fleet of presidential helicopters, which are more than 30 years-old.

Acknowledging that the program is over budget for a variety of reasons, Hinchey, Arcuri, and their 11 other House colleagues proposed an alternative way forward to the president that would involve expanding Increment 1 of the project, which has already produced eight helicopters that are currently undergoing test flights, in lieu of moving onto Increment 2 -- the more costly phase of the project. By expanding the number of Increment 1 helicopters, it's estimated that the Navy could purchase a full fleet of 23 Increment 1 helicopters on-time and within the original budget plan.

"The Marine One presidential helicopter is more than just a symbol of the office or a simple means of transport; it is integral to the safety and security of our president and thus our nation," Hinchey, Arcuri, and their 11 House colleagues wrote in a letter sent today to President Obama. "That is why we urge you to resist any attempt to politicize the VH-71 presidential helicopter program by singling it out among the large number of major programs that have exceeded their original budgets...There is little doubt that the need to replace the aging legacy fleet of presidential helicopters is real, urgent, and thoroughly documented. The current fleet has been in service more than 35 years and it is time for an upgrade to best protect the president and his family. This country cannot afford its president to be vulnerable or cut off from communications in a time of emergency."

The helicopter that the president primarily uses was constructed in 1976. The effort to replace the current fleet of presidential helicopters began following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks when it became clear that an aircraft was needed to more adequately protect the president and enable him to communicate during a crisis with top officials on the ground. In 2005, the presidential helicopter replacement contract was awarded to Lockheed Martin and its partners. The contract calls for nine Increment 1 helicopters, including four test aircraft, which are far more modern and capable than the current fleet. Increment 1 was to be followed by 23 Increment 2 helicopters, which are supposed to be even more capable and sophisticated. In their letter to President Obama, Hinchey, Arcuri, and their 11 House colleagues proposed making all of the helicopters the more affordable Increment 1-version helicopters in order to ensure the president has access to a full fleet of new, modernized aircraft within the budget and timing parameters of the contract. Eight of the Increment 1 helicopters have already been

constructed and are meeting or exceeding all of their performance parameters during their hundreds of hours of test flights.

"The fiscal year 2009 House Defense Appropriations bill noted that Increment 1 is a 'marked improvement' that 'exceeds the performance of the current fleet in virtually every respect,' Hinchey, Arcuri, and their House colleagues wrote to President Obama today. "Based on the outstanding performance of this aircraft, we urge you to consider expanding the Increment 1 fleet to make it the long-term solution if the more advanced Increment 2 aircraft cannot be procured in a cost-effective manner. Furthermore, we believe the Navy could purchase a full fleet of 23 Increment 1 helicopters within the original budget profile. Doing so would send an important message that security and fiscal responsibility are compatible when it comes to our national defense. Without question, simply canceling VH-71 at this advanced stage would be the least responsible alternative both for the safety of your office and the investment of the American taxpayer."

A decision from the White House on the future of the presidential helicopter replacement is expected in the coming weeks.

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The full text of the letter from Hinchey, Arcuri, and their 11 House colleagues follows:

March 16, 2009

Dear Mr. President:

We write to voice our support for the VH-71 presidential helicopter replacement program.

The Marine One presidential helicopter is more than just a symbol of the office or a simple means of transport; it is integral to the safety and security of our president and thus our nation.

That is why we urge you to resist any attempt to politicize the VH-71 presidential helicopter program by singling it out among the large number of major programs that have exceeded their original budgets. This program is too important to be derailed by politics.

We share your strong commitment to increasing accountability in the use of tax dollars and applaud your promise to reform the broken defense acquisition system. In recent years, too little attention has been paid to ensuring the wise management of major defense priorities. In many cases, excessive requirements are packed into programs at enormous expense and with little ultimate value to the warfighter.

However, we are alarmed by the political controversy surrounding the VH-71 program and fear it could lead to a decision that jeopardizes the security of our Commander in Chief and wastes valuable taxpayer money. There is little doubt that the need to replace the aging legacy fleet of presidential helicopters is real, urgent, and thoroughly documented. The current fleet has been in service more than 35 years and it is time for an upgrade to best protect the President and his family. This country cannot afford its President to be vulnerable or cut off from communications in a time of emergency.

VH-71 was initiated by the White House in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks and was awarded to the current industry team in 2005 after one of the most rigorous and scrutinized competitions in history, which was not protested by the losing contractor. Congress has repeatedly noted that excessive requirements coupled with unrealistic price and schedule estimates have driven current cost projections for the program's second phase beyond what is reasonable. Nevertheless, we believe canceling the program entirely would be irresponsible and self-defeating.

To date, \$3 billion has been invested in the VH-71 program and yielded notable results. Eight of the nine aircraft comprising the first phase of the program, Increment 1, have achieved flight and are meeting or exceeding all performance parameters. The fiscal year 2009 House Defense Appropriations bill noted that Increment 1 is a "marked improvement" that "exceeds the performance of the current fleet in virtually every respect." Based on the outstanding performance of this aircraft, we urge you to consider expanding the Increment 1 fleet to make it the long-term solution if the more advanced Increment 2 aircraft cannot be procured in a cost-effective manner.

Furthermore, we believe the Navy could purchase a full fleet of 23 Increment 1 helicopters

within the original budget profile. Doing so would send an important message that security and fiscal responsibility are compatible when it comes to our national defense. Without question, simply canceling VH-71 at this advanced stage would be the least responsible alternative both for the safety of your office and the investment of the American taxpayer.

Marine One is an important national security asset serving the Office of the President and is directly linked to the security of our nation. The VH-71 Marine One program was initiated by a previous administration, will enter service during your administration, and will serve future presidents for decades to come. You will have our complete support – and the support of the American people – as you move forward with this critical program.

Sincerely,

Maurice Hinchey, Michael A. Arcuri, & their 11 House colleagues